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Know Your SCHOOL

Know Your Modern Elementary School

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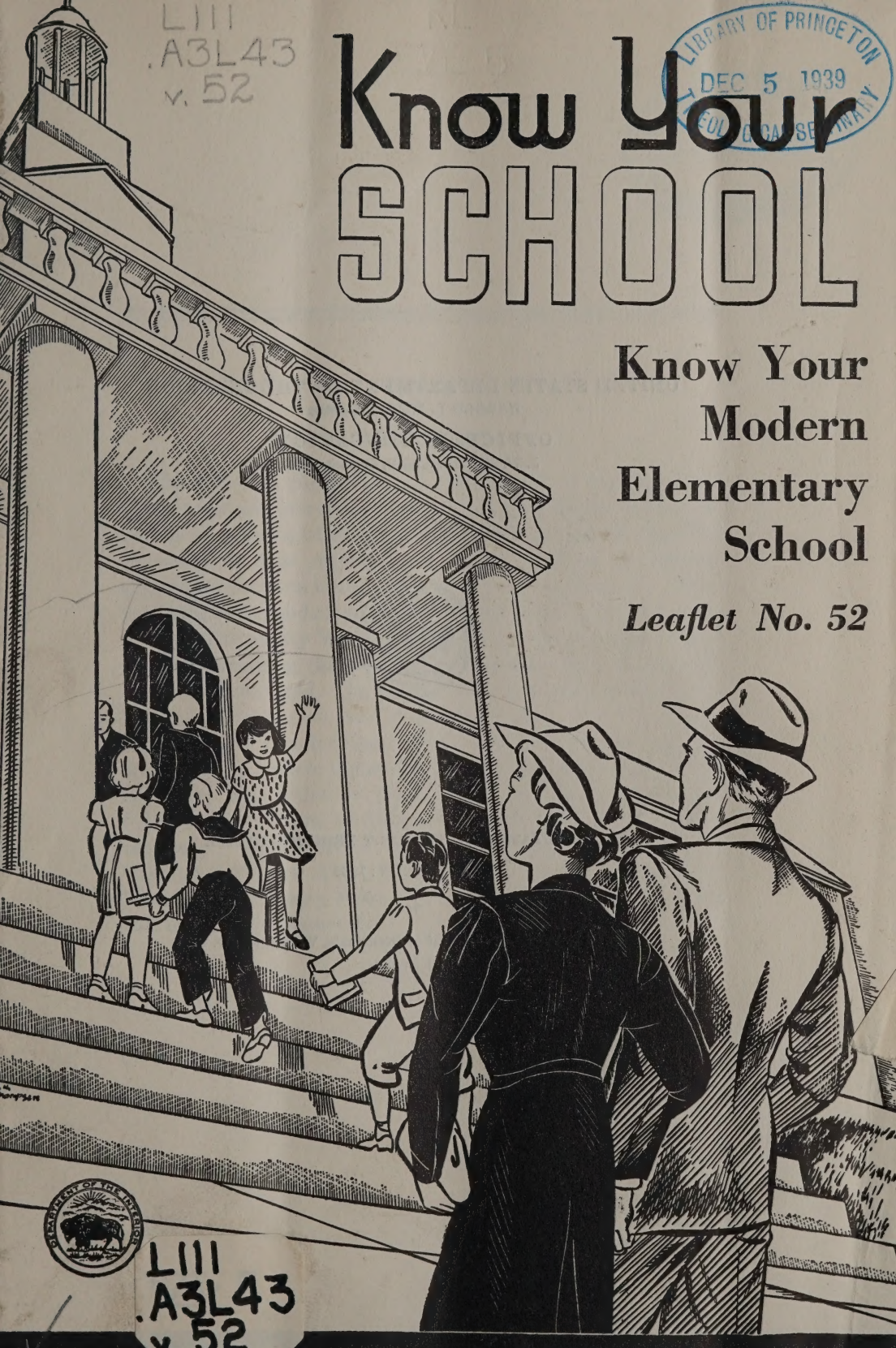

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United States Department of the Interior • *Office of Education*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HAROLD L. ICKES, *Secretary*

OFFICE OF EDUCATION
J. W. STUDEBAKER, *Commissioner*

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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FOREWORD

The Office of Education, at the request of the American Association of University Women last year, began the preparation of a series of study outlines for the use of the local branches of that organization. Four outlines in mimeographed form were issued at intervals during the year. They met with such good response not only by the American Association of University Women but by other organizations interested in studying the public-school system that the supply was soon exhausted. In view of the continuing interest, the Office of Education has decided to have these outlines, together with two developed during the current year, printed as a series of leaflets under the general heading "Know Your School." The titles of the outlines already prepared are "Know Your Board of Education," "Know Your Superintendent," "Know Your School Principal," "Know Your Teacher," "Know Your School Child," and "Know Your Modern Elementary School." Other outlines in the series will be issued at intervals.

BESS GOODYKOONTZ,
Assistant Commissioner of Education.

KNOW YOUR MODERN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By Helen K. Mackintosh

Senior Specialist in Elementary Education

In recent books and magazine articles the modern elementary school is photographed in many different poses. This level of school instruction means many things to many different people. Any attempt to picture a typical school encounters the difficulty represented by wide variations in practice throughout the United States. These differences are conditioned by many important factors. Among these the type of community—rural, village, city; farming, mining, or industrial centers; sparsely settled area—ranks first in importance. Coequal with this are such factors as the amount of money available for schools, length of the school term, kind of school organization, age of school buildings and equipment, qualifications of teachers, type of educational leadership, and provision of equal opportunities for all children.

The elementary school may consist of grades 1–5, 1–6, 1–7, or 1–8 with the possibility of a kindergarten or a nursery school as preliminary to first-grade work. The pattern of organization represented by 1–5 or 1–7 is found especially in the South; the 1–8 pattern is found in rural sections, and is probably characteristic of the country at large; and the 1–6 plan has been adopted especially by city school systems.

In elementary schools, public and private, there are approximately 22,000,000 children ranging in age from 5 to 14, more than 650,000 teachers, and in addition principals, supervisors, superintendents, and service employees who swell the numbers beyond 700,000. According to the most recent figures available, slightly more than half the elementary school children in this country attend school in a community of 2,500 population or less, are enrolled for approximately 33 weeks of the year at an annual cost of $56.39 per pupil.

Since elementary education can be classed as big business from the standpoint of number of children enrolled and annual expenditures in dollars and cents, there is need for parents and all citizens in the community to know and understand the principles on which modern schools are organized. The educator of today believes that education should be a continuous process without evident breaks between grades or between elementary, junior, and senior high school. He believes further, that every child, regardless of the community in which he lives, or the racial group to which he belongs, should have equal educational opportunities with other children of the country. He recognizes the fact that children's interests and needs should have an important part in building the curriculum, which in every case, should be planned on the basis of the community in which it is to be used. He maintains that education is something broader than the experiences to be secured within the four walls of a classroom, and that teacher and children must reach out into the community for every type of help that it can give, such as people with information, places that can be visited, and materials that can be used. He is not willing to discard tools of learning for other equally valuable socializing and creative activities, but he believes that each one has a place in a modern educational program. He would not discard subject matter, but he would modify the way in which children are exposed to it. Although not labeled as principles, these statements of belief can well serve that purpose in thinking through modern elementary education.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Make a picture in chart form of your school or school system to show the kind of community, numbers of children of school age, numbers of children enrolled in school, grades represented, type of school organization, annual cost per pupil at various grade levels, length of school year, and other factors pertinent to the local school situation.
2. With the findings from the chart consider the following problems:

   Why are there differences in the cost of educating a child at various school levels?

If there is no kindergarten in the community, determine how many 5-year-old children would profit by kindergarten instruction. What local or State requirements must be met in establishing a kindergarten? If 5-year-old children are in first grade, what kind of instruction are they receiving?

To what extent do your schools "hold" children beyond compulsory attendance age? This is one measure of the quality of education provided.

3. What provisions does the community make in its schools for the exceptional child—the blind, partially sighted, deaf, tubercular, crippled, mentally deficient, and the gifted?
4. By communicating with groups in cities of population size similar to your own, learn of the kinds of education programs which are offered in other sections of the country for children of elementary school age.
5. Examine the new pictorial reports published as annual reports of superintendents of schools, as a basis for judging what modern schools are doing.
6. Get a group of lay people representing various organizations and interests in the community, to cooperate with school people in formulating the educational goals as they see them for local schools.

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Education in the southern mountains. W. H. Gaumnitz *and* Katherine M. Cook. Washington, D. C., United States Government Printing Office, 1937. 51 p. (Bulletin, 1937, No. 26.)

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See "The Education Index" *and* "Readers Guide to Periodical Literature" for articles in journals of education.

FACTORS THAT CONDITION THE SMOOTH FUNCTIONING OF THE SCHOOL

ORGANIZATION

What machinery is necessary to make a school run smoothly?

The principal, teachers, specialists, and the school custodian, until recently known as the janitor, together with children form a cooperative working group. By seeing problems of use of equipment and materials, and their care, as a school community project, time, effort, and money are saved. When the school group follows with interest comparative monthly expenditures for fuel, lights, water, soap, toweling, and cleaning materials, they take reasonable care in using these things wisely. Each individual needs to understand the problems of the others concerned in making it possible for schools to be both happy and efficient places for work.

School organization of another type influences the nature of the curriculum and the philosophy of education which the school will express. For a period of time there was a trend toward the semiannual-promotion plan. Now the movement seems to be in the direction of an entirely different concept of promotions and of grades. The feeling has been current that grade lines are in a sense artificial hurdles which children are asked to take once or twice a year. Such a situation has presupposed that children are essentially alike and that they learn in the same way and at the same rate. But this idea is incorrect. In first grade as now set up, children differ in learning rates and capacities. As children advance in the grades these differences are much more marked. In a single field such as reading, children in a fifth grade show on the average a range of at least three grades and the spread of ability is frequently over five or six grades.

School people are questioning whether or not a child ever fails. Is it rather the school that fails in providing the kind of curriculum which makes learning possible for each individual? For these reasons schools are

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beginning to adopt what is called a "primary unit" plan. Children who are ordinarily classified at kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grade levels are considered as making up the unit. Within this unit children ordinarily spend 4 years as they work at their own speed. The gifted child, however, is not accelerated but has enriching experiences, because there is no real advantage to him in graduating from high school earlier than does the average child. The slow child may take more than 4 years to complete his work, but he will not be allowed to stay so long in the primary unit that he loses contact with his own social-age group. Children may move at different rates insofar as reading and numbers especially are concerned. Although some of the work is individualized, there are many group activities. In certain instances the teacher moves along with her group from year to year because by so doing, the usual adjustments necessary with a new group do not have to be made since she is already familiar with the special abilities and disabilities of each individual pupil. The next step beyond the primary unit is the similar unit for intermediate grades which is already making a place for itself in progressive school systems.

Although the pattern most frequently found throughout the country is the teacher-to-a-grade plan, other plans of organization are found with sufficient frequency to merit consideration. The platoon plan has been popularized especially in larger cities where there are large numbers of children, and in all schools where a primary purpose has been to make use of all the facilities of the school such as playground, auditorium, gymnasium, and workrooms to the maximum, for every school day. There is also the departmentalized plan which makes every teacher a specialist in her own field; the Winnetka plan in which work is individualized in the skills, and socialized in content fields and the arts; the Dalton plan which sets up laboratory conditions for the making and working out of assignments; and the cooperative-group plan which is an adaptation of departmentalization, but which calls for a small number of teachers working as a unit, and with almost daily con-

ferences among themselves. Sometimes more than one type of organization is found within a given community.

In the teacher-to-a-grade plan there is opportunity to bring in specialists in art, music, physical education, and literature as need for them arises. The curriculum is conceived of as a series of experiences in which subject-matter lines crisscross until there are no longer separate compartments in which arithmetic and geography, for example, can be placed. The feeling is that children are a community group as they work and play, as they plan and evaluate results.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Discover the form or forms of school organization common to your community.
2. For a 10-year period get the record of school failures in elementary grades in your schools.

   Has there been a decrease in failures, to indicate a change in point of view on the part of the school system?

   Have failures occurred at some levels more frequently than at others? Why?
3. What changes in your school organization would be necessary in order to make it possible for every child to succeed?
4. Investigate the characteristics of the following types of school organization, and evaluate their advantages and disadvantages for your school. Platoon, or work-study-play, departmental, Winnetka, Dalton, and cooperative-group plan.

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ENVIRONMENT

How Does the School Provide an Educational Climate Favorable to Learning?

Although good teaching may be done under poor working conditions, the chances for excellent instruction are apt to go hand in hand with a well-selected school staff, with modern buildings and equipment, with adequate materials for learning, and with specialized services that emphasize pupil welfare.

The principal and the teachers largely determine the educational climate in which children are to develop. "Teachers are people" said one of the profession not long ago. Cartoons, motion pictures, and stories would sometimes have us believe to the contrary. It is a recognized fact that teachers as a group may be pictured as healthy, well-balanced, and well prepared. Standards for teachers preparing to go into elementary school work are being raised gradually in all States. Teachers in a modern school are persons who like children, who have an understanding of the principles of child devel-

opment, and can apply them, who are guides rather than dictators, who take an active part in community life, and who have broad interests and varied experience.

Whether a building is old or new, it must be safe for children to live in. By "safe" is meant an affirmative answer to such questions as, "Is the building fireproof? Is the building healthful from the standpoint of sanitation and cleanliness?" The building that is properly heated and ventilated is one of the best means of securing physical fitness for work on the part of the child. The quality of lighting is now measured scientifically in many schools. Conveniently placed drinking fountains, sinks, and lavatories contribute to physical health. A building used by elementary school pupils is now designed with a modern curriculum in mind, and may be planned with the help of the principal, teachers, and children who are to use it, and with the aid of parents in the school community, as well as by the architect.

Classrooms in the genuinely modern school are large enough to make possible the free movement of children, and the shifting of equipment to meet the needs of various types of class instruction. In primary grades a workroom is frequently placed between two classrooms so that small groups can engage in construction activities during any part of the school day. For older children, a central workroom equipped for experiences with wood, clay, metal, food, textiles, leather, and with simple science apparatus is necessary in order to make learning real and vital. An assembly room where the whole school can be brought together, a gymnasium, a rest room for teachers, a room for the school doctor, nurse, and dentist are essentials. Decreases in elementary school enrollments should make possible in elementary schools that are housed in old buildings, the adaptation of vacant classrooms to some of the purposes here suggested. The outdoor surroundings of the building hold a place of importance too. All members of the school community can have a part in beautifying the grounds. Some schools make provision for a school garden, especially in cities. The importance of a suitable playground is increasingly recognized.

A playground that is modern offers sufficient space and is planned for the use of various age levels. Young children are provided with equipment which calls for some manipulation on their part, such as large boxes for building, and climbing apparatus. Intermediate children are provided with space for activities such as baseball and other sports. The suitable playground is surfaced for all-weather play, and is of such construction that children are not endangered by falls on cement.

The environment for learning cannot be taken for granted by a community when it has supplied the building and the teaching staff. The equipment and the materials which make learning concrete have a direct bearing upon the quality of education. Chairs and tables or movable seats are adjusted to individual children and can be moved to serve a variety of uses. They can be shifted into groups for committee work, or they can be built into a hollow square in the case of tables, or a circle in the case of seats, to provide audience situations. Even "screwed down" furniture can be fastened to cleats and made movable in groups of one or two seats and desks.

Blackboards still have a place in modern schools, but they are not always black nor is the chalk necessarily white. As children advance in the grades more bulletin board and less blackboard space is needed. Bulletin boards, bookshelves, tables, drawer and filing space are all necessary to the smooth functioning of a school. Maps and globes, attractive books of many kinds, paper, paint, crayons, colored chalk, and visual aids such as pictures and charts are recognized materials for work. The piano and the victrola have long been accepted necessities in the elementary school, but the radio and the film projector with an accompanying library of films are coming to be standard equipment. An aquarium, a fireplace, a built-in pool, are no longer considered as luxuries, but make their contributions to happy school living.

Other services which contribute indirectly to learning include those of the doctor, dentist, and school nurse. The school librarian makes possible a richer learning

experience because of her wide knowledge of books. The psychiatric worker and the visiting teacher may be one and the same person. Their service is of the kind which helps to tie home and school together in mutual understanding.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Survey your school building or buildings with respect to age, space, provisions for sanitation, heating, lighting, ventilation, and homelikeness. Compare the results with best practice.
2. Survey the playground facilities of your schools and check the play equipment for durability, adequacy, and educational value.
3. Survey the equipment available in your schools to find:

   To what extent are movable seats or chairs and tables in use?

   To what extent are drinking fountains of the correct type and height easily available to all children?

   To what extent are special workrooms provided?

   What items among those listed, represent standard equipment in your school system?

   To what extent is provision made in the annual budget for materials and for new equipment?
4. To what extent does your school library, or do individual classroom libraries make available many varied and attractive new books for children?
5. Observe throughout the school with the purpose of listing for at least a day's time the specific uses made of equipment and materials.
6. In what ways does the use of school equipment and materials carry over into children's expressed interests for work and play materials at home?

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See "The Education Index" *and* "Readers Guide to Periodical Literature" for articles in journals of education.

CURRICULUM

What Constitutes a Modern Curriculum for Children From 5 to 14?

Perhaps the curriculum is generally thought of as content and procedure which have been set down in

black and white on paper, for the guidance of the teacher. As a matter of fact the curriculum is much more inclusive than any printed guide can be. It not only represents those records of practice which teachers in a given community have found helpful, but it consists of the day-by-day experiences which children have in solving their problems by means of aids which the school, the home, and the community have to offer.

There are some who believe that the curriculum should be based upon children's interests, some who believe that it should be based upon their needs, and still others who think that the two points of view should be combined. Surely, neither of these bases can be ignored. Children's interests cannot be taken for granted. It is a well-known fact that they vary from age level to age level. Many studies have been made in the field of children's reading, for example. The results of these studies show that primary children are interested in boys and girls, in good story and action, animals, surprise, repetition, conversation, familiar experiences, and other qualities in varying degree. Children of intermediate-grade level are interested in boys and girls, in good story and action, but they want a story to have plot, to have animals that are real, not imaginary, to show humor, to possess mystery, excitement, and adventure, and to feature the heroic. There is also the beginning of a scientific interest. Boys and girls of junior high school age show more refinement in taste. They take certain of the qualities previously listed for granted, but they are interested in plot and characters brought together under romantic circumstances. An increased interest in real people is evidenced in the reading of some biography, and the development of a scientific interest on the part of the boys is noticeable. These illustrations indicate the range in number and variety of interests for one field only, but they do show that certain types of interests can be identified at various school levels.

The needs of children vary with the community and with the home background, although there are certain basic needs common to all children, such as wholesome food, fresh air, sunshine, sleep, dental and medical care.

Children need to have certain basic understandings concerning the tools for learning, certain clear-cut methods for recognizing problems and for solving them, experience in competing with one's own individual effort, sharing the give and take of group action and discussion; and planning, executing, and judging the results of cooperative activities.

The adoption of a modern program in elementary education does not mean that the older recognized fields of subject matter are thrown out the window. It does mean, however, that these subject fields are organized in different relationships than ever before, and with different purposes. The school day is thought of as a unit. Within it there is a balance among activities and experiences, so that those experiences which have something in common are placed together or follow consecutively. This point of view results in a changed notion of time allotments. To make the point clear, take the illustration of a large city school system which describes its school day and its time allotment in the following fashion. The curriculum is divided into five areas: Language arts, social studies, exact science, health activities, and fine arts. For these learning areas a "weekly percentage range of time" is set up with minimum and maximum ranges for each of these five major divisions. This plan makes possible a flexible daily program, because each field will receive its fair amount of emphasis in the course of a week. In many progressive school systems, teacher and children together plan the school day or school week, and at the end evaluate accomplishment or lack of accomplishment.

The primary purpose in teaching is not to cram children's minds with isolated subject matter but to make every possible use of subject matter which will clarify or enrich a classroom experience. For example, children no longer learn the multiplication combinations as tables. It is a well-known fact that 2×3 and 7×8 are not of the same difficulty. Practiced as tables, both difficult and easy combinations receive the same amount of emphasis. Obviously, the difficult combinations should receive more practice, and the easy combinations, less.

Furthermore, combinations learned in table form are recalled in sequence rather than singly, with the result that children waste time. When children have use for the combinations in conducting a school store, in planning running expenses for the school newspaper, in computing cost of milk purchased by the school, in figuring expenses for a school entertainment, they need arithmetic. On the basis of these experiences they practice combinations which have given them difficulty, to a degree where mastery is reached.

Most present-day adults learned dates in history, but learned them in isolation. The following dates are ones listed by an authority as of importance for elementary children: 1492, 1607, 1620, 1775, 1789, 1803, 1850, 1861, 1865, 1917. For how many of these can the average adult make the desired connection? Children of today who learn such dates learn them in relation to people, to groups, and preferably in relation to a problem. Emphasis is placed in general, not upon dates, but upon the period of time such as that of westward expansion, or World War. These examples illustrate the contention of modern education that children learn by doing, that children must see a purpose in every activity, and that teachers must begin with children where they are, not where they want them to be.

Reading still remains the basic tool in the curriculum. But today's parent may have difficulty in recognizing the reading period in a modern school. After visiting a first grade or a fourth, he may come away saying, "They don't teach reading." Such will be the case if he expects to find the old-fashioned type of situation in which every child in a large group had a copy of the same book from which individuals read aloud in turn. In primary grades children have reading experiences before they ever handle a book. They may bring an aquarium or a pet into the classroom, they may take a trip to the bakery, or they may construct a playhouse. As they talk about their experience they find the teacher putting down on the blackboard or chart words which tell what they themselves are saying. These stories are used as the basis for beginning reading lessons. As

children get into books, they may read individually, or they may read in small groups having similar interests. Here the reading is done not for the sake of reading—except for pleasure—but in order to find answers to questions or problems, or to prepare a story to share with others through reading it well orally.

Those concerned with curriculum building, teachers, children, parents, should feel free to draw upon any experience which the community has to offer, as a basis for securing information: A visit to the airport, the railway station, the market, industrial plants, the post office, the city hall, museums, libraries, art galleries, all offer opportunities for making learning real. In a number of communities various groups are cooperating to produce a handbook which lists community resources.

The school curriculum today is a growing, expanding phase of school effort. It can be understood only through careful study and through its interpretation by children and teachers in a modern classroom.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Make a comparison of your school curriculum of 25, 20, 15, or 10 years ago, with that of today, from the standpoint of subject offerings and organization.
2. Compare an arithmetic, reading, spelling, history, or geography book of 25 years ago, with one of today in terms of attractiveness and content.
3. Invite members of your study group to keep a week's record of interests of their children, observed or expressed. A blank may be provided to show this for various age levels. Supplementary to this would be observations made on playgrounds and in libraries. The same procedure may be followed for children's needs.
4. Visit a classroom other than that in which your own child is a member, to observe the methods that are in use.
5. Invite your superintendent, supervisor, or principal to give you a bird's-eye view of the local curriculum.

6. Investigate to find whether your city and your State have curriculum programs under development.
7. Use a radio broadcast to picture the variety of activities which your schools have to offer.
8. Survey your community, in cooperation with your schools, for places of educational interest and, from the facts secured, build a simple mimeographed handbook.
9. Invite nonmembers to join you for an open meeting which reports the results of your studies on this section.
10. Plan a "Do You Know" sheet which will publicize the activities of your school system.

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GUIDANCE

How Can the School Guide Each Pupil to Develop to the Maximum of His Ability?

No program of guidance for elementary school children can be developed without close cooperation between school and home. There is increased need at the present time for a better recognition of individual and mutual responsibilities on the part of these two institutions. Not long ago parents in a suburb of a large Midwestern city were asked to check a questionnaire of 22 items, to indicate whether responsibility for developing, for example, "knowledge of and habits of good manners" rested with the school, with the home, or with both. The results indicated that the parents expected the school to do the major part of the job.

To quote from the conclusions, "In only three items did more than half of the parents feel that major responsibility lay in the home." This shift in point of view makes school people all the more eager to look at the problem of guidance objectively, and with the cooperation of parents and other citizens in the community.

Acknowledging that modern education is not limited by the four walls of a classroom, the school indicates that it must assume increasing responsibilities, but it wants these to be shared obligations. The pupil report card for a long time has been the chief connecting link between the school and all the homes of the community. Parents who never set foot inside the school have at least that degree of contact. The nature of the report card has changed and is changing. From a printed card with subjects and deportment indicated in percentages, it has become in some instances a card which still retains subjects, but which uses letters as grade indications, or gives a general statement to show satisfactory, or improved work. The present trend is toward a card developed in much more detail and with many points to be checked, or at the other extreme, an informal letter to parents. In some instances parents have been unwilling to accept the new report cards because they say, "I can't tell what they mean. I can understand an A or a 100." But can they? All grading is largely subjective. One teacher's A may be another teacher's B. There is no absolute yardstick which a teacher may use for measuring pupils' accomplishments.

Another type of record which has great value is the individual cumulative record card. Such a form lists all available information concerning the child; his home background, his physical condition, his school progress, his changes from school to school, his outstanding traits, his interests. From year to year, following his first enrollment in school, additional facts are recorded. By referring to such a record card, the principal and the teachers who work with a child are better able to give him proper guidance.

Little formal guidance work is done at the elementary school level. The visiting teacher in some cities, and the psychiatric social worker in others help to make guidance a home and school function. Some schools provide helping or coaching teachers who assist children who have difficulty in adjusting to a school program, or who fail to learn at an average rate. Assistance is given especially in the field of reading. Larger cities have guidance clinics which study the special problems of individual children whom the school has failed to help by the means at its disposal. The clinic makes use of individual tests in a variety of fields. These include tests of intelligence, of personality, and of accomplishment for the individual child. In some situations an expert administers the individual test to the child even though there is no clinic. A classroom teacher may give under supervision, a group test of intelligence as a basis for determining the general mental level of the group with which she works. The present point of view considers the intelligence test as an aid but not as a final answer to the question, "How intelligent is this child?" Home background, experience, and reading ability very definitely affect a child's test score.

Tests of the achievement or accomplishment type are widely used especially in the skill fields, such as reading, arithmetic, spelling, and writing. Here they serve their chief purpose as diagnostic measures when given at the beginning of a year or a semester, since a child's score offers him a starting point for work. When the test is repeated at the end of the year or the semester the child checks the amount of his own individual improvement. In this way he competes with his own record rather than with the others in the group. Although tests of this type are used primarily for purposes of class instruction, the listing of yearly results on the cumulative record card makes it possible for the teacher to use the information for guidance purposes.

The activity program in schools has made it possible for children to give expression to interests in working with various materials such as clay, wood, metal, leather, paper, textiles, and foods. Sometimes activities

are organized in the form of a hobby program. Increased emphasis upon art and music as mediums of expression in a creative way, gives the teacher opportunity to recognize talent. Through activities of all sorts the teacher is made aware of the child's interests and their importance with reference to the way in which his school program should be organized. Some children are much more gifted in the arts and crafts than in subject matter. Activities of the nature described offer these boys and girls a chance for school success.

Guidance at the elementary level needs further emphasis with the active cooperation of all those who are concerned with the best development of children. In the total educational program, equal attention should be given to the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional phases of the child's life.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Examine the check list of responsibilities described in the article by Arnold with the idea of using it in a modified form in your own community.
2. Examine the report card used in your community and compare it with those of other communities of similar size and background. Use the circular by Davis as a guide.
3. Study the cumulative record card in use in your school system to determine the value of such a form in guidance of elementary school children.
4. Summarize the types of guidance offered by your local schools.

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